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USDA RELEASES COST OF FOOD AT HOME FOR FEBRUARY

WASHINGTON, March 29—Here is the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s monthly update of the weekly cost of food at home for February 1991:

Cost of food at home for a week in February 1991

	-----Food plans-----			
	(In Dollars)			
	Thrifty	Low-cost	Moderate cost	Liberal
Families:				
Family of 2 (20-50 years)	48.80	61.50	75.80	94.10
Family of 2 (51 years and over)	46.30	59.20	72.80	87.10
Family of 4 with preschool children	71.20	88.70	108.10	132.80
Family of 4 with elemen- tary schoolchildren	81.40	104.00	130.00	156.60
Individuals in four-person families:				
Children:				
1-2 years	12.90	15.70	18.20	22.10
3-5 years	13.90	17.10	21.00	25.20
6-8 years	16.90	22.50	28.20	32.90
9-11 years	20.10	25.60	32.90	38.20

Chart continued on next page.

Females:

12-19 years	21.10	25.10	30.40	36.80
20-50 years	21.10	26.20	31.80	40.60
51 and over	20.90	25.50	31.40	37.50

Males:

12-14 years	20.90	29.00	36.10	42.50
15-19 years	21.70	30.00	37.20	43.20
20-50 years	23.30	29.70	37.10	44.90
51 and over	21.20	28.30	34.80	41.70

USDA's Human Nutrition Information Service computes the cost of food at home for four food plans—thrifty, low-cost, moderate-cost, and liberal.

Sue Ann Ritchko, HNIS administrator, said the plans consist of foods that provide well-balanced meals and snacks for a week.

In computing the costs, USDA assumes all food is bought at the store and prepared at home. Costs do not include alcoholic beverages, pet food, soap, cigarettes, paper goods and other nonfood items bought at the store.

“USDA costs are only guides to spending,” Ritchko said. “Families may spend more or less, depending on such factors as where they buy their food, how carefully they plan and buy, whether some food is produced at home, what foods the family likes, and how much food is prepared at home.”

“Most families will find the moderate-cost or low-cost plan suitable,” she said. “The thrifty plan, which USDA uses to set the coupon allotment in the food stamp program, is for families who have tighter budgets. Families with unlimited resources might use the liberal plan.”

To use the chart to estimate your family's food costs:

—For members eating all meals at home—or carried from home—use the amounts shown in the chart.

—For members eating some meals out, deduct 5 percent for each meal eaten away from home from the amount shown for the appropriate family member. Thus, for a person eating lunch out 5 days a week, subtract 25 percent, or one-fourth the cost shown.

—For guests, add 5 percent of the amount shown for the proper age group for each meal.

Costs in the second part of the chart pertain to individuals in fourperson families. If your family has more or less than four, total the “individual” figures and make these adjustments (note: larger families tend to buy and use food more economically than smaller ones:

- For a one-person family, add 20 percent.
- For a two-person family, add 10 percent.
- For a three-person family, add 5 percent.
- For a five- or six-person family, subtract 5 percent.
- For a family of seven or more, subtract 10 percent.

Details of the four family food plans are available from the Nutrition Education Division, HNIS, USDA, Federal Building, Hyattsville, Md. 20782.

Johna Pierce (301) 436-8617

#

BROWN RICE GETS LONGER STORAGE LIFE, HIGHER EXPORT POTENTIAL

WASHINGTON—USDA researchers have filed for a patent on a new process that doubles brown rice’s storage life to at least a year, thus allowing the commodity to retain its tasty, nutty flavor for a longer period of time, said Elaine T. Champagne of USDA’s Agricultural Research Service.

Champagne, a co-inventor, said the process, which uses ethanol to prevent rice from turning rancid, also could play a role in increasing exports of brown rice. Of 2.5 million metric tons of rice exported by the United States in fiscal year 1990, brown rice accounted for 339,141 metric tons.

Champagne and colleagues Robert J. Hron, Sr. and George Abraham, all of the ARS Southern Regional Research Center in New Orleans, found that ethanol deactivates lipase enzymes in brown rice bran. Without deactivation, the enzymes degrade oil in the bran, resulting in free fatty acids that cause off-flavors and off-odors, Champagne said.

She said high temperatures during overseas shipments can cause the lipase enzymes in bran to degrade oil faster. This results in high levels of free fatty acids, she said, so that the bran “loses its value as human food and animal feed, while also making oil in the bran uneconomical to refine.”

Brown rice stabilized by ethanol retains its nutritional value and has the appearance and cooking properties of natural brown rice. "Oil in brown rice bran may have new nutritional significance," Champagne said. She pointed to health studies indicating that this oil lowers cholesterol levels.

Bran, the outer brown layer of the rice kernel, is rich in dietary fiber, protein, carbohydrates, minerals, oil and vitamins, she said. Removing the bran by milling lowers the nutritional value of brown rice and results in white rice.

Other ways to stabilize brown rice against rancidity involve subjecting it to moist or dry heat, parboiling or precooking. But these methods can alter rice-kernel appearance and texture of the cooked product and remove valuable nutrients, she said.

Studies of the ethanol process at the New Orleans lab also found:

- * Chances of bacteria and mold appearing in brown rice are decreased.
- * Free fatty acids can be removed from rancid rice, eliminating off-odors and off-flavors.

Only 18,461 metric tons of brown rice were used for food in the United States in crop year 1986-87 compared with 848,226 metric tons of white rice, according to a USDA survey. Later figures for the crops will be released in the next few months.

Bruce Kinzel (301) 344-2739

Issued: Mar. 29, 1991

#

CCC INTEREST RATE FOR APRIL REMAINS 6-3/8 PERCENT

WASHINGTON, April 1—Commodity loans disbursed in April by the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation will carry a 6-3/8 percent interest rate, according to Keith Bjerke, executive vice president of the CCC.

The 6-3/8 percent interest rate is unchanged from March and reflects the interest rate charged CCC by the U.S. Treasury in April.

Robert Feist (202) 447-6789

#

USDA PROPOSES AMENDING U.S. SORGHUM STANDARDS

WASHINGTON, April 1—The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Federal Grain Inspection Service proposed today to amend the U.S. standards for sorghum.

The proposed rule would: (1) separate the grading factor "broken kernels, foreign material, and other grains" (BNFM) into two factors, "broken kernels" (BN) and "foreign material" (FM); (2) reduce the amount of Brown sorghum allowed in Yellow sorghum; (3) modify the classification terminology for the classes Yellow and Brown sorghum; and (4) revise the definitions for all classes of sorghum.

To reflect more accurately the actual levels of dockage (DKG) found in sorghum, FGIS is also proposing to amend the general provisions of the official U.S. standards for grain to require the reporting of sorghum dockage to the nearest tenth of a percent.

FGIS Administrator John C. Foltz said the proposed changes will implement, in part, the Grain Quality Improvement Act of 1986. Foltz also said producers and the industry have been working cooperatively to improve grain quality through grain quality workshops. Two of the proposed changes—reducing the amount of Brown in Yellow sorghum and separating the combined BN and FM limits—were recommended by these workshops.

This proposed rule is scheduled for publication April 2 in the Federal Register. Comments must be submitted in writing before May 24, to Allen A. Atwood, FGIS, Room 0628-S, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Box 96454, Washington, D.C. 20090-6454; FAX users may call (202) 447-4628.

Dana Stewart (202)382-0378

#

USDA SEEKS COMMENTS ON 1992 ACREAGE REDUCTION PROGRAM FOR WHEAT

WASHINGTON, April 1—Keith Bjerke, executive vice president of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation, today asked for public comment on whether the 1992 acreage reduction program (ARP) should be 5, 10 or 15 percent. The estimated impacts are in the table below.

An ARP decision must be announced by June 1. USDA is also required to propose options for the wheat program, accompanied by an analysis that includes estimated planted acreage, production, domestic and export use, ending stocks, season average producer price, program participation rate and cost to the federal government.

Further program details will appear in the April 4 Federal Register. Comments may be submitted to: Director, Commodity Analysis Division, USDA/ASCS, Room 3741-S, P.O. Box 2415, Washington, D.C. 20013. Comments must be received by May 10 to be assured consideration.. All comments will be available for public inspection in Room 3744-S during regular business hours.

A regulatory impact analysis on the 1992 wheat program may be obtained from the Commodity Analysis Division.

Estimated Impacts of 1992 Wheat ARP Options

Item	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
ARP (%)	5	10	15
Participation (%)	88	86	84
Planted Acres (Million acres)	72.9	70.0	67.1
Production (Million bushels)	2,340	2,260	2,175
Domestic Use (Million bushels)	1,130	1,11	51,100
Exports (Million bushels)	1,250	1,225	1,200
Ending stocks (Million bushels)	837	797	752
Season Average			
Producer Price (\$/bushel)	2.70	2.78	2.86
Deficiency Payments (\$/million)	2,580	2,229	1,914

Robert Feist (202) 447-6789

#

USDA SCIENTISTS FORAGE FOR FOREIGN NUTS

WASHINGTON—Hickory seeds gathered from the wilds of Vietnam and the People's Republic of China by U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists may help protect American pecan trees from pests and disease.

Pecans, the most popular nut of the hickory (*Carya*) species, are one of the few crops native to North America.

“We want to see if there are genetic traits in the Asian hickory species we brought back that may strengthen the North American species,” said Jerry A. Payne, a scientist with USDA's Agricultural Research Service.

Payne reported on the exploration for foreign pecans in the March issue of *Agricultural Research* magazine.

Payne, acting director of the ARS Southeastern Fruit and Tree Nut Research Laboratory in Byron, Ga., participated in a three-member team searching for Asian hickories. They brought back two species of hickories from Vietnam and two from the People's Republic of China.

“We didn't get two of the Asian species we went after because they were located in areas too remote for us to visit. However, scientists in Vietnam and China promised to send us samples when they locate them,” said team member L.J. Grauke.

“Then, for the first time, we'll have all six Asian hickories in the United States.”

Grauke is curator of the National Clonal Germplasm Repository for *Carya* at Brownwood, Tex., where the 14 North American hickory species are maintained. He and Payne were accompanied on the five-week excursion, which took place in September 1990, by Bruce W. Wood, horticulturist at Byron.

According to Payne, insect control for pecans costs U.S. growers about \$75 million a year. In addition to insect problems, growers face the threat of pecan scab, root rot, crown gall, and kernel diseases. They must also deal with alternate bearing, which is a wide fluctuation in nut production each year. Payne said that solutions to many of these problems would be aided by breeding Asian hickories with North American species.

Seeds from *Carya tonkinensis*, collected from trees in the Northwestern Forest Reserve at Son La, Vietnam, are already sprouting tiny green shoots in greenhouse plantings. Seedlings are used to test for disease and insect resistance and to study the evolutionary relationships of the genus, he said.

Both the Vietnamese and the Chinese value the medicinal properties of hickories. In addition to food, they use oil from the nuts for lighting and cooking. Vietnamese women drink tea brewed from hickory tree bark to contract the uterus after childbirth. The Chinese steam the nuts with raw ginger, sugar, and orange peels and use this concoction as a cough remedy and an analgesic.

U.S. growers produced 251 million pounds of pecans in 1989, valued at over \$179 million.

Doris Stanley (301) 344-2767

Issued: April 2, 1991

#

USDA ANNOUNCES PLANS FOR IMPROVED MEAT AND POULTRY LABELS

WASHINGTON, April 2—The U.S. Department of Agriculture today announced plans to help consumers better understand the nutritional qualities of meat and poultry.

USDA proposes to require mandatory nutrition labeling for processed meat and poultry products and voluntary labeling for fresh products, said Jo Ann R. Smith, assistant secretary of agriculture for marketing and inspection services.

“Consumers deserve more information about the nutrient content of all foods they purchase,” Smith said. “We believe consumers have the right to nutrition information and we want to make it easier for them to make informed dietary choices.

“We encourage consumers to voice their suggestions about what nutrients to list on meat and poultry labels, the format of the labels, and what descriptors such as ‘lite’ or ‘lean’ are most useful,” Smith said.

USDA’s public request for consumer comments on nutrition labeling is the latest step in the department’s labeling-reform effort. After reviewing public comments on its initial plans, USDA intends to publish proposed regulations later this year.

Over the past two years, USDA has jointly sponsored a labeling study, held public hearings and worked closely on its labeling positions with the Food and Drug Administration, which regulates foods other than meat and poultry. “USDA is committed to harmonizing its nutrition labeling proposals with FDA,” Smith said.

Smith said USDA will establish a standardized serving size for meat and poultry and define terms such as “lower fat” and “extra lean.”

The department also announced it intends to require listing of the following nutritional information on labels: calories, calories from total fat, total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, total carbohydrates, complex carbohydrates, sugars, dietary fiber, total protein, and sodium. USDA is also considering the advantages for consumers of abbreviated label formats for some meat and poultry products.

For a complete discussion of these issues, plus others on which USDA is seeking public comments, see the Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking published in today’s Federal Register. Comments are due June 3, and should be sent to the Policy Office, Attention: Linda Carey, FSIS Hearing Clerk, Room 3171-S, Food Safety and Inspection Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. Oral comments or questions should be directed to: Mr. Charles Edwards, Director, Food Ingredient Assessment Division, Regulatory Programs, Food Safety and Inspection Service, (202) 447-7680.

FSIS is responsible for ensuring that meat and poultry products are safe, wholesome and accurately labeled.

Jim Greene (202) 382-0314

#

USDA COMPLETES STUDY FOR ERADICATING COMMON CRUPINA WEED

WASHINGTON, April 5—The U.S. Department of Agriculture has completed a study on procedures for eradicating a menacing weed that threatens cropland and rangeland in Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

In addition to cropland and rangeland, the noxious weed, known as common crupina, also poses harm to crop production, watersheds, native plants, wildlife and farm exports, according to James W. Glosser, administrator of USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

The APHIS study recommends eradication be carried out through integrated pest management.

“This is an exotic weed, not known in the United States until its discovery near Grangeville, Idaho, in 1968. Today, the weed has infested 63,500 acres in north central Idaho, Umatilla County, Ore., and Chelan County, Wash.,” Glosser said.

In cooperation with the University of Idaho, APHIS examined the feasibility of eradicating the weed throughout the infested area. The in-depth study, including a practical trial, showed that eradication is technically feasible at current levels of infestation.

APHIS followed the trial with an assessment of how eradication might affect human health and safety as well as threatened and endangered species, wildlife, water resources and other environmental factors. APHIS environmental specialists analyzed data generated from these and other studies as well as comments from 37 organizations and individuals who were interviewed.

Glosser concluded from the results that federal action is warranted and that integrated pest management should include appropriate manual, mechanical, chemical, biological, thermal and cultural methods. He said no significant adverse environmental impact is expected, and threatened or endangered species will not be adversely affected.

Copies of all pertinent documents are available for public inspection. They include three environmental assessments (one for each state), a finding of no significant impact and a record of decision. Copies may be obtained from agencies in each of the affected states or from: USDA, APHIS, PPQ, DEO, Room 643 Federal Building, 6505 Belcrest Road, Hyattsville, Md. 20782. A notice stating that these documents are available is being published in the April 4 Federal Register.

Caree Vander Linden (301) 436-7280

#

USDA REVISES P.L. 480 TITLE I COUNTRY ALLOCATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 1991

WASHINGTON, April 5—The U.S. Department of Agriculture today issued revised country and commodity allocations for the third quarter of fiscal year 1991 under Title I of Public Law 480, the Food for Peace Program.

F. Paul Dickerson, general sales manager for USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service, said the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990, and Presidential Executive Order 12752 of Feb. 25, assigned responsibilities for implementing Title I to the secretary of agriculture. Dickerson said that to help carry out these assigned

responsibilities, USDA will issue quarterly news releases to update program plans for the P.L. 480 Title I program.

According to Dickerson, only \$25.5 million of the \$461.9 million available for Title I commodity purchases in fiscal year 1991 remains unallocated. Dickerson said that 17 countries are presently scheduled to receive approximately 2.7 million metric tons (grain equivalents) of commodity assistance.

The countries eligible for the Title I program are those developing countries experiencing a shortage of foreign exchange earnings and having difficulty meeting all of their food needs through commercial channels. The priorities for country allocations are based on several factors including need for food, undertaking of economic and agricultural measures to improve food security, and potential for becoming a U.S. commercial market.

The allocations take into account changing economic and foreign policy situations, market development opportunities, existence of adequate storage facilities and possible disincentives to local production. Dickerson said that since situations may develop which cause a change in country and commodity allocations during the fiscal year, these allocations do not represent final U.S. commitments with participating governments.

Title I of P.L. 480 is a concessional sales program to promote exports of agricultural commodities from the United States and to foster broad based sustainable development in recipient countries. The program provides export financing over payment periods of from 10 to 30 years, grace periods of up to 7 years, and low interest rates. Depending upon the terms of the agreement, payment may be in dollars or in local currencies.

Additional technical information on the P.L. 480 program is available from Mary Chambliss of USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service, (202) 447-3573.

For a complete list of allocations, call the FAS Public Affairs Office at (202) 447-3448.

Sally Klusaritz (202) 447-3448

#

USDA PROPOSES ESTABLISHING SPECIAL GRADE FOR GLUTINOUS RICE

WASHINGTON, April 5—The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Federal Grain Inspection Service is proposing to amend the U.S. standards for rice by adding a special grade for glutinous rice.

Glutinous rice, also known as waxy or sweet rice, is characterized by chalky, nontranslucent kernels. Chalky kernels are considered to be undesirable in the present standards.

In the case of glutinous rice, however, this chalky characteristic is acceptable, explained FGIS Administrator John C. Foltz.

Therefore, to assist the marketing of glutinous rice, Foltz said, FGIS is proposing to revise the present U.S. standards for rice so that the grading factor "chalky kernels" does not apply to rice assigned the special grade "glutinous."

This proposal will be published in the April 8 Federal Register. Public comments must be submitted in writing before June 3 to Allen Atwood, Federal Grain Inspection Service, Room 0628 South Building, U.S. Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 96454, Washington, D.C. 20090-6454; telecopier users call (202) 447-4628.

Dana Stewart (202) 382-0378

#

USDA SEEKS COMMENT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO COTTON RESEARCH AND PROMOTION ORDER

WASHINGTON, April 8—The U.S. Department of Agriculture is seeking comment on proposals to amend the Cotton Research and Promotion Order (regulations implementing the 1966 Cotton Research and Promotion Act) so that the order agrees with certain amendments in the 1990 Farm Bill.

Daniel D. Haley, administrator of USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, said the amendments would provide for:

- importer representation on the Cotton Board, the body executing programs of the 1966 Cotton Research and Promotion Act which the order implements;

- assessing imported cotton and cotton products and remitting the assessments to the Cotton Board the same as with domestic cotton;

- increasing from \$200,000 to \$300,000 the amount the Cotton Board can reimburse the secretary of agriculture for costs of conducting a referendum;
- reimbursing government agencies which assist in collecting assessments on imported cotton and cotton products;
- terminating the right of producers to demand a refund of assessments; and,
- authorizing a review by the secretary of agriculture every five years to ascertain whether a referendum is needed to determine producer and importer support for these amendments.

Haley said the amendments would not become effective unless approved by a simple majority in a referendum of cotton producers and importers.

Notice of the proposed amendments will appear as a proposed rule in the April 10 Federal Register. Comments, postmarked no later than May 10, should be sent to Craig Shackelford, Cotton Division, AMS, USDA, Rm. 2641-S, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, D.C. 20090. Copies of the notice are available from Shackelford at that address, tel. (202) 447-2259.

Clarence Steinberg (202) 447-6179

#

USDA ANNOUNCES ESTIMATED 1990 WOOL AND MOHAIR PAYMENTS

WASHINGTON, April 8—The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced today that wool producers will receive about \$105 million in 1990 marketing year price support payments on shorn and pulled wool and mohair producers will receive about \$60 million. Payments will begin April 10.

The 1990 support price for shorn wool is \$1.82 per pound, determined by the National Wool Act of 1954, as amended. The 1990 national average market price for shorn wool, \$0.80 per pound, was \$1.02 less than the support price.

The 1990 shorn wool payment rate of 127.5 percent is the percentage which brings the average price received by all producers up to the support price. The payment rate will be applied to the net proceeds received by producers for shorn wool marketed during the marketing year.

The Wool Act provides that pulled wool shall be supported at a level comparable to the shorn wool support rate in order to maintain normal pulled wool marketing practices. Accordingly, producers will receive \$4.08 per hundredweight in price support payments for unshorn lambs that were sold or slaughtered during the 1990 marketing year.

For mohair, the 1990 average market price was \$0.93 and the support price is \$4.532 per pound, making the payment rate 387.3 percent.

Payments will not be made for producers' sales that are in excess of a maximum sales price per pound of wool or mohair which, for the 1990 marketing year, is four times the national average price, or \$3.20 per pound for wool and \$3.72 per pound for mohair.

Bruce Merkle (202) 447-8206

#

OLDER AMERICANS FACE SPECIAL RISKS FROM FOODBORNE ILLNESS

WASHINGTON, April 8—The effects of aging, including a weakened immune system, poor eyesight and reduced senses of smell and taste, puts 35 million Americans over 65 face at increased risk from foodborne illness, according to Dr. Lester M. Crawford, administrator of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service.

"May has been proclaimed Older American's Month. This is a good opportunity to educate older people about foodborne risks and how they can protect themselves by following the basic rules of safe food handling," Crawford said.

Older people are more vulnerable to illness caused by foodborne bacteria for a number of reasons, Crawford said.

Older people frequently have a weak immune system which in some cases is worsened by poor nutrition. "As people grow older they sometimes lose their sense of smell and taste and their appetite suffers. As a result, they increase their chance of having vitamin deficiencies that could undermine their immune system," Crawford said.

A diminished sense of smell may also make it difficult for an older person to determine when food is spoiled. In a Duke University study, 86 percent of college students accurately identified odors of common foods such as chocolate, cinnamon, and coffee, but only 34 percent of older people correctly identified the odors.

In addition, about half of all people with severe vision problems are over 65. “This makes it difficult for them to see if food is spoiled or utensils aren’t clean,” Crawford said.

Many older people face increased risks from foodborne illness because their stomachs are low in acid, which can help destroy harmful bacteria. Finally, poor blood circulation increases risk of illness because cells from the immune system are carried through the blood. If blood has trouble reaching the site of an infection, the infection may go unchecked.

“Bacteria are everywhere, on our skin, in dirt, on surfaces we touch and in perishable foods such as meat and poultry. But safe food handling can greatly reduce the risk of illness from harmful bacteria,” Crawford said.

Since last year, Crawford said, FSIS has been conducting an information campaign to teach older Americans about such risks and how to protect themselves. Food-safety information has been distributed through the media, associations representing the elderly, and federal agencies such as the Administration on Aging, which provides more than 270 million meals a year through senior citizen centers and meals-on-wheels programs.

Keys to safe food handling include:

- Never eating raw or undercooked meat, poultry, seafood or eggs.
- Washing anything that comes in contact with raw foods with hot, soapy water—including hands, counters, utensils and cutting boards.
- Cooking food thoroughly to destroy harmful bacteria. Meat and poultry should be cooked until there is no pink color inside and the juices run clear. Fish should flake with a fork when done and eggs should be cooked until solid.

A new FSIS publication called “A Quick Consumer Guide to Food Safety” covers food safety aspects of food shopping, storage, meal preparation, cooking, microwaving and handling leftovers. The guide also includes a chart detailing how long you can safely keep foods in the refrigerator and cooking temperatures that will kill bacteria. For a single free copy write to: Consumer Information Center, 574-X, Pueblo, CO 81009.

Consumers with questions about safe handling of meat and poultry can also call the USDA’s Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-800-535-4555, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays, Eastern time. (Washington, D.C., area callers should dial (202) 447-3333.)

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service has been conducting consumer education programs promoting the safe handling of meat and poultry since 1973. The agency's 9,000 employees are dedicated to ensuring safe, wholesome and accurately labeled meat and poultry.

Jim Greene (202) 382-0314

#

SMOKERS MAY FEEL IT IN THEIR BONES

WASHINGTON, April 9—Women smokers who are concerned about developing osteoporosis have another good reason to kick the habit, based on findings of a U.S. Department of Agriculture study.

The two-year study of 320 women past menopause produced the first evidence that smoking accelerates the loss of bone mineral—at least in some bones, said principal investigator Elizabeth Krall. Krall is an epidemiologist at the Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts, Boston, which is funded by USDA's Agricultural Research Service.

“The effect of smoking on bone mineral may not be nearly as great as the effect of estrogen loss, a low calcium intake or the lack of physical activity,” she said. “Smoking is a small influence, but it's an influence.”

Krall and colleagues measured the women's bone density at four body locations—the forearm, hip, spine and heel—at the beginning, middle and end of the study. All 320 women began with about the same bone density.

But the 35 smokers lost bone mineral in their forearms at an average of nearly 1 percent per year, whereas the 285 nonsmokers had no loss, Krall reported in the April Journal of Bone and Mineral Research.

Differences between the two groups in the hip, spine and heel were not statistically significant, she said, but the trend was similar.

The smokers also retained substantially less calcium from a supplement, she said, and this could account for their greater bone loss. It appears they absorbed less of the mineral to begin with, she added, noting that an earlier study concluded that smoking reduces calcium absorption.

Krall said two previous studies that followed the rate of bone loss in smokers and nonsmokers over several years found no difference between the two groups. But the number of women may have been too small to

see a difference, she said, or the women were in the early stages of menopause.

“During the first few years after menopause, women are losing bone rapidly due to the loss of estrogen, so it might be difficult to see a difference due to smoking,” she explained. “Our women were older—averaging 58 and 59 years of age.”

Other studies that made a one-time comparison of bone density between smokers and nonsmokers in all age groups produced mixed results. Some reported less dense bones in smokers, while other found no difference, she said.

In the studies that found a difference in women before and during menopause, she said, researchers speculated that smoking reduces the peak bone mass attained in early adulthood.

Judy McBride (301) 344-4095

#

USDA ANNOUNCES CHANGES IN COTTON RESEARCH AND PROMOTION REGULATIONS

WASHINGTON, April 10—The U.S. Department of Agriculture is amending the Cotton Research and Promotion Order’s regulations regarding penalties for failure to remit assessments to the Cotton Board promptly and in full, effective May 13.

Daniel D. Haley, administrator of USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service, said the amendments will:

- specify that interest charges be imposed on first buyers of cotton (also known as “collecting handlers”) who are sent a second certified mail notice of past-due assessments in any one marketing year;

- stipulate that interest and late payment charges be applied from the first working day on or following the 20th day of the month in which assessments were due;

- establish procedures for publishing names of collecting handlers delinquent in remitting assessments to the Cotton Board; and,

- allow notification of growers that their particular collecting handlers failed to remit assessments.

Haley said the amendments are necessary to encourage the few collecting handlers delinquent in their assessments to remit them more promptly.

The assessments fund the Cotton Board, which sponsors research and promotion projects to advance the use of cotton.

The Cotton Research and Promotion Order, under which the board functions, is authorized by the 1966 Cotton Research and Promotion Act.

Notice of the amendments will appear as a final rule in the April 11 Federal Register. Copies and additional information are available from Craig Shackelford, Cotton Division, AMS, USDA, Rm. 2641-S, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, D.C. 20090; tel. (202) 447-2259.

Clarence Steinberg (202) 447-6179

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COMPUTER COMBATS LONE STAR TICKS

WASHINGTON—U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists have turned the computer against the lone star tick, *Amblyomma americanum*.

The scientists have developed a computer model to forecast how various anti-tick tactics will snuff out enough of these pests so they don't multiply.

Lone star ticks live primarily in Texas and Oklahoma, but can also be found as far north as Iowa and as far east as the Atlantic coast. The ticks bite humans, pets and wildlife, causing swelling and redness in people allergic to tick bites. They are also suspected of having a role in the transmission of Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever.

A single female lone star tick can lay up to 8,300 eggs in her lifetime, leading to large build-ups in the tick population. What's more, the lone star tick has a tendency to cluster where an intruder has appeared, whether human or wildlife.

Such occurrences helped spark a citizens' effort in eastern Oklahoma in the 1970s to find ways to squelch lone star tick populations in recreation areas. Ticks bite humans, pets and wildlife, causing swelling and redness in people allergic to tick bites.

Gary A. Mount, an entomologist was assigned to a laboratory opened in Poteau, Okla. in 1977 by USDA's Agricultural Research Service. He and colleagues at other agency facilities started working on strategies to control the tick. This led the team to develop the computer program and a handbook on the use of various controls and their potential effectiveness, based on field tests.

The Poteau lab was closed in 1988 once the work was completed and steps were taken to make the materials available free of charge to park managers, said Ralph A. Bram, ARS national program leader in Beltsville, Md. Park officials can get copies of the materials from Bram (301 344-2771). "The handbook and computer program give park managers a way to predict what control measures will do the best job," Bram said.

One of the chief strategies for control is keeping the population of white-tailed deer to a minimum within camping and hiking areas, Bram said. It may require fencing out the deer, he said, because they are a major host for the tick. Clearing out brush that can harbor ticks and spraying antitick insecticides also help control the pests, according to Bram.

In cooperative field tests with the Tennessee Valley Authority in Kentucky and Tennessee, combinations of the recommended control measures reduced tick populations by 90 percent or more for several years, said Bram.

According to Bram, the agency has continued research on reducing tick infestation in deer herds. One approach has been the experimental use of the drug ivermectin.

ARS researchers Glen Garris and J. Allen Miller in Kerrville, Texas, found that after deer ate the drug mixed in whole kernel corn or pelleted feed, ticks on the deer stopped feeding and died. Ivermectin has been approved in the United States for use on a wide variety of livestock, but reindeer are the only wildlife species on which its use is currently legal.

Linda Cooke (309) 685-4011
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